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Dissertation on the Hepatic State of Fever

Of all the viscera contained in the cavity of the abdomen, none perhaps, is so subject to disease as the liver. It is not my intention in the present short Essay, to take notice of all the diseases affecting this important organ, but shall only treat of that designated by Nosologists, "Hepatitis," or inflammation of the liver, and by Professor Rush, "hepatic State of Fever." Hepatitis is an endemic disease of warm climates, and most frequently occurs in the United States, in the Summer and Autumn, when intermitting, remitting, and intestinal Fevers prevail. It is, doubtless, frequently a form or modification of a disease, proceeding from the same causes, and prevailing under like circumstances with the above diseases. This is probable from the season of the year,

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and the kind of weather, in which it appears, the manner of its invasion, the face of the country, and the method of treatment. It is in fact, nothing more, than a misplaced bilious Fever — Hepatic inflammation, therefore consider, as a Symptom of original disease in the sanguiferous System —

The disease in question, alike to rheumatic, phrenitic, and other states of Fever, exists under two forms, the acute and chronic — both of which may be produced by the same remote and exciting causes — The acute, generally, shewing, precedes the chronic — The Symptoms described by Authors as designating this disease, are numerous; the most prominent — in general accord with Dr. Cullen's definition. Vid. Synop: — They are, however, much diversified, often commencing with chills, succeeded by increased heat of the body, pulse quick

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frequent, and tense, dryness of the mouth and fauces, acute pain in the right hypochondrium, and often in the epigastric region, which is increased by a deep inspiration, & pain about the clavicle and right shoulder. The pain is sometimes much augmented by the patient's lying on the left side. This, however, is not an uniform symptom. Besides the symptoms above enumerated, the patient is sometimes troubled with a cough and hiccup, and respiration becomes laborious. These symptoms may, doubtless originate from the liver pressing against the diaphragm, or by forming adhesions (the effect of inflammation) with that muscle. Dr. Mathews observes that this disease is sometimes ushered in with symptoms of the greatest malignity as the peculiar staring and wildness of the eyes, with inflammation, occasional

delirium, a depressed pulse, and blood when drawn evincing all the marks of the highest degree of inflammatory diathesis. This disease often bears the greatest analogy in its attacks to Pleurisy, from which it may be easily distinguished, by attending to the observations of Dr. Pemberton on this Subject. He observes that a gradual inspiration does not produce cough, although it increases the pain, that the pain is increased by gentle pressure upon the margin of the ribs, which would not be the case if the inflammation were within the chest, and that the cough (if it be present) is found to have succeeded the pain several days, and not to have preceded, or to have been coeval with it, as in Pleurisy. There is however, but little necessity for attending to diagnostics, as the Physician

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should generally be governed by the state of the system. Rheumatic & hepatic inflammation frequently invade the System with equal violence, and they both require the same prompt depleting remedies—

The duration of this disease is only to be determined by the violence of its attacks. If the Symptoms which have been enumerated continue to increase, a Suppuration of the Liver will soon take place. The Symptoms indicating Suppuration to have taken place, are the general ~~[illegible]~~ strength of the patient being much exhausted by the remedies, at the same time that Fever and pain remain equally violent, or, an abatement of the pain with increased frequency of the pulse, attended with repeated chilly fits— In the chronic stage, the Symptoms, which have already been described, as indicating the acute stage, exist, but they differ in degree—

It is discovered by a sense of weight and dull pain in the right side, the tongue is of a whitish appearance, the pulse increased in frequency & force, and is sometimes intermitting. The appetite is much impaired and the countenance sallow.

The remote causes of Hepatic Fever, (as I have observed in a former part of this Essay) are the same with those producing intermitting, remitting, dysenteric, and other forms of bilious Fever. The following appear to be the most uniform — 1st Excessive heat, 2nd Marsh Miasmata, 3d Intemperance in eating and drinking, particularly the excessive use of spirituous liquors, 4th Sudden changes in the weather, 5th Violent exercise — Dr Clarke observes, that the Europeans who undergo much fatigue, & particularly amongst the Military, Hepatitis, obstructions

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and swellings of the Liver, were the most common diseases — 7th Bad Water, Dr Clegham ascribed the frequent recurrence of this disease to this cause. To these may be added, indolence and sedentary occupations.

The proximate cause of this state of Fever, is the same with that of all others, and consists in morbid or irregular action in the sanguiferous System, particularly in the arterial, with a determination to the Liver — It is difficult to form a prognosis in this disease, as the cure is very fallacious and uncertain — There is no disease, I believe so apt to return after being apparently cured — The causes which produced the original aptitude or predisposition, continuing to be applied, render the convalescent liable to a relapse upon every morbid derangement of the System, the Liver being

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the weakened part, fever any how produced, finds its way to and spends its force upon it. The following circumstances, have been supposed to indicate a favourable issue 1st an unexpectated eruption, 2nd Profuse diaphoresis, 3d Copious discharge of turbid urine. When the suppurative stage has commenced, the prognosis can seldom be favourable — Dr Clark, says, if the abscess open through the Diaphragm into the Lungs and be discharged by the Bronchia, the patient may sometimes (though rarely) recover. If it open into the Cavity of the abdomen or Thorax death would be the consequence, a more favourable issue might be expected, when the abscess points outwards, or opens into the Duodenum or Colon —

For the Cure of this disease in its acute and incipient form all the remedies for inflammation must be applied with promptitude and resolution; as the success or permanency

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of the cure will depend on the quickness with which morbid vascular action is removed, and the consequent determination of blood to the Liver is taken off. For this purpose the best and most efficacious remedy is, 1st Blood letting. This mode of abstracting excitement has a pre-eminence of all others, in being much less circuitous in its operation. The lancet should be used freely and frequently, according to the violence of the symptoms, and its effect on the pulse. As subsevient to the intention of resolution, 2dly Cathartics may be exhibited. Emolient Clysters may also prove useful auxiliaries. 3dly Blisters. These cooperate strongly with the views of Bloodletting. They should be applied to the region of the Liver, and frequently repeated if the pain continues violent. During the exhibition of these remedies, the patient should be confined to a low diet, and should refrain from all spirituous and

fermented liquors. If these remedies have been properly administered and do not effect a cure, recourse should be had to 4th ly Mercury — This should be given so as to induce a salivation. Dr Lind advises a ptyalism to be kept up for fifteen or twenty days, and remarks, that the Mercury sometimes produced a looseness which also cured the disease. For the Cure of the chronic Stage, Mercury has been principally relied on — But as this Stage is generally attended with fever, the use of the lancet and gentle purging should precede its exhibition — Small bleedings dictated by the State of the System are only advisable. This form of the disease is generally attended with so much debility as to make large evacuations of any kind hurtful. — — — Blisters should be applied over the region of the Liver, and the blistered part, dressed with strong mercurial ointment. The common

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practice is to exhibit mercury in every form practicable. The best mode, I imagine, would be, by friction, as the Stomach is already much debilitated, and labouring under indigestion and loss of appetite. Nitric acid should be given in doses of four or five drops, four or five times a day in a little sweetened water. The dose may be gradually increased. This remedy, properly prepared, is grateful to the patient, promotes appetite and digestion, and keeps up the alvine discharges, with the aid of a little Magnesia given occasionally between the doses. Bark chalybeats and other tonic medicines may be given to obviate debility. If these remedies prove unsuccessful, travelling to a colder climate should be advised. Strict attention in both diet and dress should be observed.

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If from a neglect of the treatment proposed, or from an injudicious employment of the remedies, a suppuration of the Liver is known to have occured, by the occurrence of the symptoms, which have been described as indicating its existence: the life of the patient becomes much in danger by a spontaneous opening of the abscess; it should, therefore, be the solicitude of the Physician to procure a discharge externally, by means of the caustic or incision, the latter method should be preferred, and will in some instances be attended with success. Several cases of recoveries, are mentioned by Lind and Mathews where an opening of the abscess had been made, without delay, by a free incision with the Scalpel.

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Here, Gentlemen, I conclude this short and imperfect Essay — If it be in the least worthy of Merit it will be for your Superior judgements to decide —

Permit me, illustrious Sirs, to express my grateful acknowledgements, for the instruction derived from your invaluable Lectures, and that you may long enjoy a continuance of your health, adequate to the important offices you fill, is the sincere wish of your Friend and Pupil